(TMI Journal, Vol. III, Nos. 1 & 2, Winter-Spring 2011)

APPLICATIONS OF ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN DAILY LIFE

by Ruth-Inge Heinze, PhD

The Annual International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternative Modes of Healing was founded in 1984 by Dr. Ruth-Inge Heinze to preserve and further the integrity of shamanism and share the latest insights in the field of alternative healing. Each year for the last 24 years, scholars and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines related to shamanism have gathered to compare notes and discussed future cooperation. The conference is a unique opportunity to test the results of past year's work in discussions with colleagues, be confirmed, and also be stimulated by the work of others. For conference information, go to: shamanismconference .org

The following paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association (Pacific Division), Los Angeles on March 31, 1994. This paper is reproduced by permission of the American Anthropological Association and the estate of Ruth-Inge Heinz. Originally published in Anthropology of Consciousness*, Volume 5, Issue 3, pp. 8-12, 1994. Not for sale or further reproduction.*

ABSTRACT

First, I discuss the importance of recognizing different states of consciousness. Knowing how these states differ from each other and recognizing their specific qualities determines their use, increases our self-knowledge, balances our behavior, and adjusts our course of action. Second, I report on workshops conducted in the United States, Russia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The examples illustrate the nature of material retrieved during different states of consciousness. Third, I evaluate the respective techniques that can be used to access different states of consciousness and show how they can be applied to everyday life.

Introduction

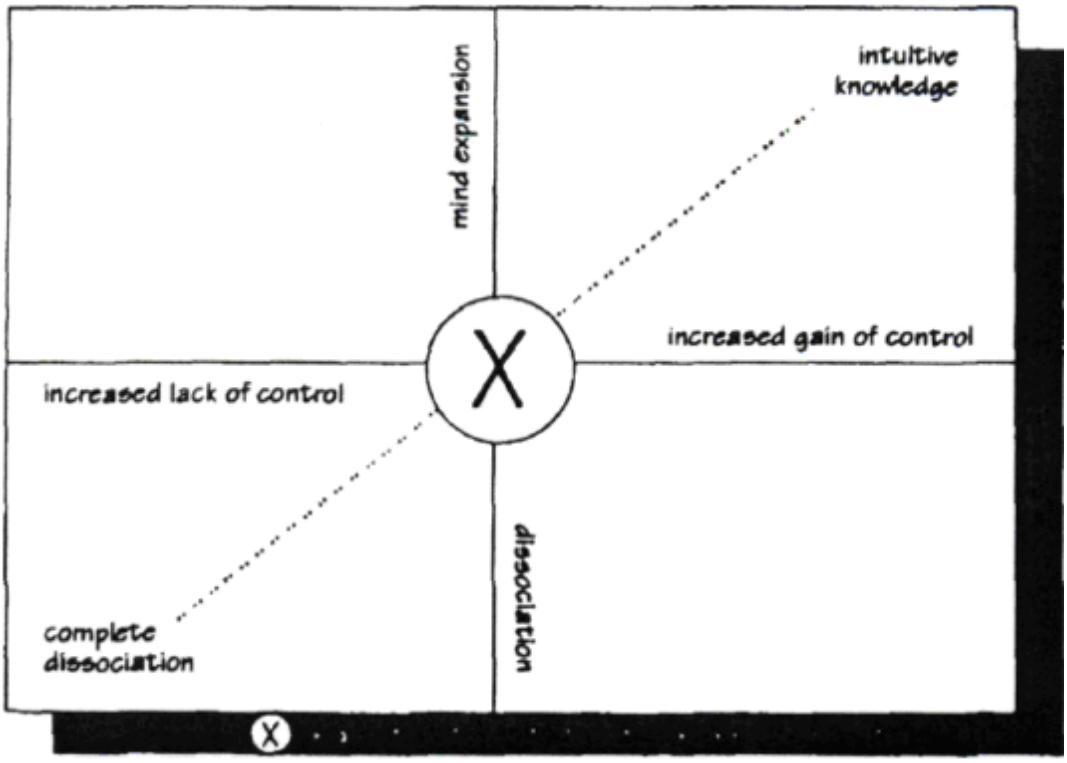
When we begin to recognize the qualities of specific states of consciousness, we are able to develop a tool chest. We can then decide which tool to use when we want to increase not only our knowledge of self and others, but also seek access to vitally important information that has not yet reached the level of consensus reality. I will start with the seminal definition of altered states of consciousness, provided by Ludwig (1966). In his opinion, altered states of consciousness are any mental state(s) induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological maneuvers or agents, which can be recognized subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in

subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness. (p. 225)

Ludwig (1966) admitted that “there will be some conceptual pitfalls in such a general definition.” A whole generation of researchers has, indeed, continued the search for better definitions and methods to operationalize specific states of consciousness. In other words, scholars began to look for ways in which experience of such states can be distinguished in their application to daily life. Tart (1986) refers to “the nature of the pattern and the elements that make up the pattern [which] determine what you can and cannot do in that state” (p. 4).

Among those who mapped out different states of consciousness we find Fischer (1971); Krippner (1972); and Tart (1969, 1986). Especially in his *Waking Up*, Tart (1986) spoke of obstacles of human potential and discussed methods to overcome them. Winkelman (1986) surveyed psychophysiological research on the effects of trance-inducing procedures and states of “parasympathetic dominance in which the frontal cortex is dominated by slow wave patterns originating in the limbic system and related projections into the frontal parts of the brain” (p. 174).

Our “hidden observer,” according to Hilgard (1978), watches the fluctuations of our consciousness between ordinary and non-ordinary realities, but may not always be prepared for uncharted (i.e., previously not explored) territory. cf. Heinze 1993, p. 203



Although the range of possible altered states of consciousness has not yet been fully explored, I am presenting the diagram above to serve as a working model for our discussion.

When we begin to cultivate awareness, we progress on the diagonal, from the lower-left to the upper-right quadrant. With growing insight, our control over the successive states also increases until we achieve *intuitive knowledge*, the highest point in the upper-right quadrant. This state indicates full control and complete awareness (i.e., the state of Being—knowing without objectification and detour through discursive thinking). The lowest point in the lower-left quadrant indicates complete dissociation (i.e., multiple personality, schizophrenia, possession with complete loss of control). Jung (1963) spoke of "unconscious, autonomic complexes" which appear in such a state "as projections because they are not associated with the ego" (p. 95).

To give an example for the caution we have to exercise when we want to define the state in which an individual is operating, I am reminded of the dilemma with shamans and mediums who say they go on magical flights and also call spirits into their body. In the latter case, they maintain that they are surrendering their consciousness to the spirit who begins to act through them. In some cultures, the dissociative state of unexpected possession may be treated with exorcism; however, in most cultures, shamans will explore whether the possessed can be trained to use this state professionally for healing and information retrieval. According to my model, trained practitioners descend from the point of consensus reality to dissociate into the lower-right quadrant (i.e., they retain a certain degree of control). Only at the depth of their possession do they surrender (i.e., experience flooding) and have to be plotted temporarily in the lower-left quadrant. They have, however, been trained to leave this state after its purpose has been fulfilled and ascend on pathways paved during their training, upward from the lower-right into the upper-right quadrant. Schizophrenics have to be plotted at the lowest point in the lower-left quadrant because they have neither recall nor control over this state of consciousness.

On the other hand, when going on magical flights, shamans and mediums have to be plotted ascending on the diagonal into the upper-right quadrant because they experience expansion of consciousness which they control to the point where they enter intuitive knowledge and the state of Being.

We recognize the fact that shamans as well as mediums use two qualitatively different states of consciousness (either mind-expanding or dissociating) for information retrieval, whenever required by their clients. Furthermore, training manuals in spiritual traditions (e.g., Patanjali; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1969) and St. Ignatius of Loyola (Mottola, 1964) spell out a wide range of states that can be accessed for similar reasons.

Are there states that can be used by untrained practitioners who want to expand their field of experience? The answer is “yes.” For nearly 10 years, I have conducted workshops during which I motivate individuals to explore less accessible levels of their mind. The state is entered through partially controlled dissociation that lowers emotional barriers repressing traumatic events. It evacuates the ego and annihilates both the mechanisms of repression as well as muscle tensions. In this state, one can experience pure “energy discharge” and “archetype-like patterns of functioning” (Fitremann, 1994). At the climax of the workshop, I invite participants to look for messages that have been received but not yet risen to waking consciousness.

Fieldwork

From a sample of several hundred cases that I recorded during workshops conducted in the United States, Russia, Lithuania, and Estonia, I will now present three reports. They exemplify the nature of the material that has been retrieved during this specific state of consciousness.

First report. In September 1989, a participant reported that the drumming brought up the image of a white bird. She got on the bird and was taken high in the sky to her father’s grave at Cape Cod. She saw a Star of David made out of twigs and her father rising from the grave. He told her that he had accepted his death and her mother had allowed him to rise. He, too, had freed himself from the ties that had kept him from claiming his spirithood. This was a “tearful experience” for the participant. The next day, she found six twigs like she had seen in her vision near the retreat center.

Comment: There had not been any stimulus other than the 10 minutes of rhythmic drumming. Tired after a long day of professional discussions, the participant followed the drumbeat without any interference of discursive thought. The right circumstances had been provided and the message arose as if it had waited for this moment of relaxed attention.

Second report. In 1994, a participant reported that she walked down on wide, shallow stone stairs in a park near her mother’s house. When she got to the bottom, she was no longer in the park but in Carlsbad Caverns. She became afraid. She did not know if the next step was level ground, up a hill, a drop of a few inches, or into an abyss. She could not step forward. Finally, she stepped out. It was dark and down. Then she was lying on an operating table, in a cold, bright room, scared and alone. The drumming, strong and steady, was all she could hear. She was on the operating table with toxemia, and her blood pressure was in the stroke range. She knew that she might die at any moment and that her unborn baby was far too young to survive. The lights were too bright, and the people were maintaining that awful silence that medical people keep when they don’t want to alarm the patient. She was in the sorrowful company of women who died in childbirth. At this point, the drumming was becoming more and more intense. She cried in fear. She left the vision and considered whether she should get up and leave the room without disrupting the others but decided she couldn’t. Back in the operating

room, she was being cut on. It hurt. She was as afraid in the vision as she had been during the real operation. The drumming was most intense now. Why didn't it stop or at least back off? Why can't she forget? She wanted to get out. She wanted a different vision to happen. She became angry but the drum continued beating. She couldn't separate from the memories, from the fear. She listened to the drum and tried to ride it. Drum surfing. Any place else had to be better. She became the drum, became the beat. Then she was no longer the drum but the sound. Pulsing. Tensing, relaxing. Breathing, flowing, moving. She rode the top of the sound like a wave. She didn't sink but began to laugh. A full belly laugh. The grass was green, like spring. Life had burst forth. She was dancing to the beat of life. The dance was strong and she was the beat. Life was joy. She began to dance more forcefully, like Shiva, with many arms, dancing, stamping the creation into being. Wake up! Be solid! Be real! She became one with Life. It was time to come back. She was still alone but no longer afraid of either the dark or the aloneness or herself. She was empowered in the fullest sense. She walked back up the stairs, into the forest. When it was time to open her eyes, she did not hesitate to leave the vision.

Comment. The participant had been through the door of life. She had gone through a wide range of emotions. Familiar scenes led her to facing past traumas. However, she felt empowered and dealt with the horror. She remembered that she could use the sound of the drum. She also overcame her aversion to the driving force of the drum and rode the sound until she was able to dance freely and joyfully the dance of creation.

Third report. In July 1992, a participant wrote after her first drumming session:

I began to wait for something to emerge. A giant snake started crawling up from a far comer of the room. It was big and powerful. Some great energy and power were felt in all of its movements. The giant snake kept approaching me, as if some energy were flooding the room. I felt neither fear nor despair. "Is there any way out?" Suddenly I noticed that the small head of the snake started coming out of the crown of my head, it was very small and kept moving up. I felt that the snake was crawling through me, flooding my body. I felt it moving, in my legs, belly, arms, breast, and head, filling my body very powerful, strong, and big. I turned into a light green stone. I felt neither panic nor tension, but I wanted to find a way out. To my surprise I was no longer a stone, I was ice. The transparent light green color was the color of ice in sunlight. I was relieved, I now had a way out. The sun melted me and I became a light blue cloud, floating higher and higher. I heard a voice, "You must come back into the room." I didn't know how I possibly could come down again, being so light and evaporated. It seemed absolutely impossible. I became a big drop of water, concentrated myself, and came down into the comfortable room. Walking up the stairs, I opened my eyes. A feeling of freshness and inner clarity with a pervading sense of great mystery surrounded me.

Comment: This vision was experienced in Russia before the 1992 coup. The political tension was palpable everywhere. The faces of the people on the streets reflected fear, uncertainty,

hopelessness, and lack of orientation. The participant expressed her surprise about the stages of transformation and the richness of her first experience. Clarity, hope, and renewed strength arose from less accessible regions of her being. I do not want to interpret her experience further because the meaning of the symbols is the personal property of the visionary.

The Technique

I have designed a technique by which we can access a state of consciousness to:

(1) find out whether inner and outer experiences need to be balanced (e.g., grief or trauma need to be resolved);
(2) access the source of strength and nourishment; and/or
(3) look for new information.

First, participants learn how to release barriers through breathing. Breath is the sign of life. When we stop breathing, life will stop as well. To use our full capacity for breathing, we have to release not only the used-up air but also what we have repressed or suppressed, sometimes for a long time. Participants are invited to fully exhale from the diaphragm while they are visualizing that they are "sweeping their bodies." Exhaling prepares us for the drinking of fresh air. One's whole body is being nourished. Breathing is also rhythmic, whether we breathe fast or slow. Breathing too fast can lead to hyperventilation. For a brief period, it may be very invigorating, but after approximately 3 minutes of fast breathing we become light headed, which has not the quality of clear awareness we are aiming at. There is also yogic breathing, which, practiced systematically, results in prolonged suspensions of breath to a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, and this increase in the concentration of CO^2 lowers the efficiency of the brain as a reducing valve and permits the entry into consciousness of experiences, visionary or mystical, from "out there" (Huxley, 1963, p. 144). Participants are told to breathe slowly but fully, to enjoy the release and go with the ebbing in and out of the breath.

The next step is relaxation—full-body relaxation—so that we become receptive for tuning. The purity of the sound of a Tibetan bowl, for example, will clear and entrain one's mind, alleviate mistrust, foster understanding, and evoke joy. Tuning is the most pleasant way to interconnect.

For the third step—information retrieval—I use *sonic driving* (Heinze, 1988, pp. 84-94; 1991, pp.157-168); e.g., 10-minute drumming. Sonic driving assists in the process of connecting whatever needs to be reunited and we are motivated to act and to explore. By purifying and reconnecting our body with our mind, emotions, and soul, the conditions for breaking through the layers of misconception are provided. Expectations arise and may reduce the number of self-defeating thoughts and images and may increase the frequency of coping self-statements and positive images (Bootzkin, 1985, p. 207).

At this point, we begin to discover hidden resources and may find messages waiting for us. For the main part of the exercise, I designed a simple structure that borrows elements from hypnotherapy. Participants are reminded to remember each step so that they later can find their way in dreams or other journeys on their own. This means that I make sure they never surrender control. After having been led through breathing, relaxation, and tuning, participants are invited to mentally go down 10 steps, to see a door, and to memorize how it looks. They are asked to open the door, enter the room, and close the door behind them. The room serves as a *space station* between different states of consciousness. Participants are asked to look around and memorize what is in the room, on the walls, and on the ceiling. Whom do they meet? They can ask questions, why they are there, and they should look for a message. They then are asked to go to a second door on the other side of the room, memorize the nature of this door, open the door, step out, and close the second door behind them.

Having stepped out, into the unknown, 10 minutes of sound (using either a drum or a Tibetan bowl) provides the container for the main part of the experience. Participants are told that it is important to start the quest with a quiet mind and clear intentions. It is also important not to expect anything but keep the mind in the observer position, like sitting in a movie theater, looking at the blank screen, not knowing which movie will be played. Discursive thinking would be interfering. However, everyone is encouraged to remember what transpires. As we begin learning to trust the source of inner knowing and our connection with the universe, the conditions for the emergence of deep-seated memories have been created.

After 10 minutes, participants are led back the same way and asked to write down their experiences immediately, not to allow their minds to edit the content later. Trained and untrained participants alike have no problems during this partially controlled dissociative state. They feel generally quite comfortable and welcome newly found knowledge and power. Sound facilitates the exploration of the unknown and unlocks the information stored in our cells. The visions we are looking for are found inside of us.

Discussion

Deikman (1969, p. 24) talked about three forms of visionary and mystical experiences: (1) the untrained-sensate, (2) the trained-sensate, and (3) the trained-transcendent. Meditators and yogis have trained-sensate experiences (i.e., visions), while trained-transcendent individuals practice toward mystical experiences. For individuals without any regular spiritual practice, insights may emerge either at moments of complete tranquility or at critical moments when our consciousness cannot go any other way. We live simultaneously at least on five different levels of awareness—the biological-physical, the emotional, the mental, the social, and the spiritual. My technique provides the means to recognize the language of each of these levels and to interact with them. Thus, information that is not available to waking consensus-reality but is vitally important to the present condition of the individual is now accessible.

Through education at home, at school, during our professional training, and by other peer groups, grids are imposed on us that filter out all so-called “useless” information. Additionally, we have to take into account the interferences of our autonomic nervous system that always tries to prevent systems overload. When we create a space and a time where we can relax some of the control mechanism, we are able to retrieve vitally important information that indicates areas that require attention. I argue that during our waking state in consensus-reality, important information is screened out. Nearly every culture known to us has developed techniques to access this natural source of nourishment, encouragement, and information. It does not seem to be a coincidence that many scientific discoveries have been made in different states of consciousness.

Related articles of interest published by the Anthropology of Consciousness Journal http://www.sacaaa.org/anthropologyofconsciousness.asp:

“Consciousness Studies: The Emerging Military-Industrial-Spiritual-Scientific Complex” by Chris Hables Gray, Anthropology of Consciousness, Volume 18. Issue 1. March 2007 (pages 3-19)

“The Evolution of Consciousness? Transpersonal Theories in Light of Cultural Relativism” by Michael Winkelman Volume 4. Issue 3. September 1993 (Pages 3-9)

“Meditations on Anthropology without an Object: Boulder Hopping in Streams of Consciousness” by Sarah Williams Volume 18. Issue 1 (March 2007)

References

Bootzkin, R .R. (1985). “The Role of Expectancy in Behavior Change”. In L. White, B. Tursky, & G. E. Schwartz, (Eds.), *Placebo: Theory, Research and Mechanisms* (Pp. 196-210). New York, NY: Guilford.

Deikman, A. J. (1969). Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience. In C. T. Tart (Ed.), Altered States Of Consciousness (Pp. 23-43). New York, NY: John Wiley.

Fischer, R. W. (1971). “A Cartography of the Ecstatic and Meditative States”. *Science*, 174(4012), 897-904.

Fitremann, J. M. (1994). “The Use of Ecstatic Trance for the Treatment of Addictive and Abused Individuals”. In R.-I. Heinze (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Altered Modes of Healing*. Berkeley, CA: Independent Scholars Of Asia.

Heinze, R.-I. (1988). Trance and healing in southeast Asia today. Berkeley, CA: White Locus, Independent Scholars of Asia.

Heinze, R.-I. (1991). Shamans of the 20th century. New York, NY: Irvington.

Heinze, R.-I. (1993). Alternate states of consciousness: Access to other realities, In B. Kane, J. Millay, & D. Brown, (Eds.), Silver threads: 25 years of parapsychology research (pp. 201-209). Westport, CT: Praeger. Hilgard, E. R. (1978). Divided consciousness: Multiple controls in human thoughts and action. New York, NY: John Wiley. Huxley, A. (1963). The doors of perception. New York, NY: Harper and Row. Jung, C. G. (1963). Memories, dreams, reflections. A. Jaffe, Ed. New York, NY: Vintage Books. Krippner, S. (1972). Altered states of consciousness. In J. White (Ed.), The highest state of consciousness (pp. 1-5).

Garden City, NY: Doubleday. Ludwig, A. M. (1966). Altered states of consciousness. Archives of General Psychiatry 15, 225-234. Mottola, A. (Trans.) (1964). The spiritual exercises of St Ignatius. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. Prabhavananda, S., & C. Isherwood (Trans.) (1969). How to know God. The yoga aphorisms of Patanjali. New York, NY:

New American Library. Tart, C.T. (1969). Altered states of consciousness. New York, NY: John Wiley. Tart, C.T. (1986). Waking up: Overcoming the obstacles to human potential. Boston, MA: Shambhala. Winkelman, M. (1986). Trance states: A theoretical model and cross-cultural analysis. Ethos, 14,174-203.

Even when I was studying mathematics, physics, and computer science, it always seemed that the problem of consciousness was about the most interesting problem out there for science to come to grips with. David Chalmers

Hemi-Sync® is a registered trademark of Interstate Industries, Inc.
© 2011 by The Monroe Institute